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**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission

March 12, 2018

Steve Davies, Area Manager
Bureau of Reclamation
PO Box 30137
Billings, MT 59107-0137

RE: Yellowtail Dam Management Criteria

Dear Mr. Davies:

I write to you today on behalf of Montana's Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Commission is very concerned about the management criteria of Yellowtail Dam, and the resulting effects on the river system downstream in recent years. We have been contacted by numerous Montanans – farmers and ranchers, small business owners, anglers, and landowners – who have been affected by the river's unstable flows. These folks are understandingly worried that once again their land and livelihood will be compromised by high flows. Last year the river experienced more than 120 days of flow exceeding 8000 cubic feet per second. We fear that management to date will lead to extended high flows again this year.

The Bighorn River's trout fishery, and the jobs and businesses it supports, represent a \$100 million per-year economy that is vital to the area. This industry relies on a healthy river ecosystem, and current management practices have had the effect of slowing business, limiting recreational opportunities and frustrating fish management practices. We respectfully ask for an interim adjustment to lessen the likelihood of damaging flows down the Bighorn and into the Yellowstone.

As stewards of Montana's lands, fish, wildlife and waters, the Fish and Wildlife Commission urges the Bureau of Reclamation to continue its work with the technical working group and adopt new, fairer management criteria for Yellowtail Dam. By implementing new criteria, in which risk is shared by all user groups in both high and low flow years, Yellowtail Dam can be managed to protect agricultural producers and recreationists on the river, as well as lake users above the dam. In short, we ask that the Bighorn River system not bear a disproportionate share of the risk in years of inaccurate forecasts.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Vermillion

Dan Vermillion, Chairman

DV:crf